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A radio talk by A. B. Graham, in charge of Subject-Matter Specialists, Office of Cooperative Extension Work, delivered through a network of 51 associate NBC Stations in the 4-H Club Program of the National Farm and Home Hour, Saturday, September 5, 1931.

The first two boys' and girls' agricultural clubs of nearly thirty years ago were known in both Ohio and Illinois as boys' and girls' experiment clubs. Corn and beets were tested by the club members to determine which varieties were best adapted to the soil and climate of the locality. The Ohio club tested soil for acid and sought a treatment that would assist clover to grow in soils that were said in that day to be "clover sick." Vegetables and flowers provided opportunities for girls as well as boys.

Boys' corn clubs were organized in Mississippi twenty-four years ago to help diversify farm products in a cotton-growing State that was rapidly becoming infested with cotton boll-weevil. Of course the various crops grown also afforded the members a source of income. Corn and tomato clubs in South Carolina and other Southern States gave opportunity for membership to both boys and girls twenty-two years ago.

As to records, clubs in the Northern States kept such details as the time of planting, date of sprouting, number of cultivations, date of harvesting, and the yield by bushel measure. Those of the South in the very beginning of the work showed items of expense, yield in pounds, and the net gain or income. This general plan prevails to-day.

Club enrollments of years ago were obtained mainly through the schools whereas to-day they are obtained in various ways, depending upon the number of active community organizations.

Leaders were of course the teachers or superintendents of schools. They had little or no training as club leaders. To-day local leadership has passed into the hands of former club members and interested adults, principally farm men and women with some training for the job. Project names such as corn, potatoes, etc. have changed very little but many additions such as baby beef, poultry, etc. have been made offering a greater choice than in the first work.

The minimum age of early club members was about ten, and no maximum age was set. However, most of them had ceased to be members before they reached fourteen: 4-H club work has the same attraction for the ten year old to-day but the maximum ages of members now run well into the later teens.

The local farmers' institutes and county fairs found the products of the first clubs on exhibition. These early exhibits were composed principally of corn, vegetables, canned products and rope splices to which have been added in fifteen years poultry and livestock, a variety of foods, clothing, and other things.

In the early days of agricultural clubs in the South, individuals were awarded trips to Washington, D.C. This practice has spread to the entire country but qualifications to come to the National 4-H Club Camp have soared upward until only a maximum of four from each State may qualify to-day. In
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the North the early clubs went in large groups by train to visit the agricultural colleges for one day. To-day visits to the colleges are three or four-day affairs and the practice has spread to most of the States.

Only a few of the early clubs held regular meetings. Such members as did meet gave progress and other reports on their work and listened to further instruction and demonstrations in rope splicing, canning, seed selection, the best methods of preparing exhibits, and other things very much as is done at present. Much to the benefit of the social nature of boys and girls, activities such as games, dramas, singing, and yells have been added to round out the instruction work. Now many harmonica bands, over 130 orchestras, more than 60 brass bands, rural dramatics, singing contests, and other entertainment features furnish amusement on many special occasions.

The activities of the early clubs caught the ear of the public press probably in the same degree as to-day, when one considers the number of members and the limited projects. But in the early days it found no such avenue as a radio hook-up of many stations through which to carry 4-H messages direct to the homes of thousands of persons in all parts of the country. No national celebration of 4-H achievement in which all members take part by means of the radio, such as has been announced for November 7, was possible in the old days.

The halls of our State Universities and Agricultural Colleges found the early club members clamoring for educational advancement. With a membership today of 850,000 - 10,000 times the size of the first club - some agricultural colleges can pride themselves on from one-tenth to one-third of their enrollment from 4-H club boys and girls.

Perhaps the greatest achievement has been the one set forth before ever the three-leaf or four-leaf clover became the club emblem: To change the attitude of rural youth toward life in the open country.